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Viewing cable 09ANKARA1637, TURKEY'S LETTER TO GREECE: DEAR GEORGE

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
09ANKARA1637	2009-11-16 11:27	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Ankara

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001637

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SUBJECT: TURKEY'S LETTER TO GREECE: DEAR GEORGE

REF: ANKARA 1626

Classified By: DCM Doug Silliman, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The Turkish MFA proudly points to Prime Minister Erdogan's October 30 letter to Greece as a positive step for the future of bilateral relations between the two countries, but admits that much depends on Greece's response -- and the ongoing Cyprus negotiations. In the letter, Erdogan touched on almost every major bilateral issue, from the minority rights to illegal immigration. MFA officials insist that Turkey has the political will to move relations forward. However, the resumption of Turkish overflights of Greek islands in the Aegean could complicate things. End Summary.

¶2. (C) PM Erdogan sent a three-page letter to Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou on October 30 in response to Papandreou's visit to Istanbul on October 9 (scanned copy of letter sent to EUR/SE 11/12). During a November 10 meeting with the DCM, MFA Deputy Under Secretary Halit Cevik passed us a copy of the missive. It listed Cyprus, Aegean matters, minority issues, and illegal immigration as key bilateral priorities for Turkey. According to Cevik, the inclusion of illegal migration, for example, is significant because of the importance Athens places on the issue. He said Greece has not yet responded to the letter, but noted that Ankara understands a reply is underway. The Greek Embassy here has also told us that it expects a response soon.

¶3. (C) The sending of the letter received widespread press coverage. Excerpts on key topics include:

-- Cyprus: Ankara is encouraging the Turkish Cypriots to seek settlement and Athens should do the same with the Greek Cypriots. Turkey suggests a meeting of four international players on Cyprus when the talks reach an appropriate level (Note: The level was not specified. End Note)

-- Aegean matters: Turkey offers to accelerate exploratory talks, adopt new Confidence Building Measures, and agree to a "Code of Conduct" between the two countries for the safe conduct of military flights in the Aegean. The Code of Conduct would be "non-prejudicial"; that is, it could not be cited as precedent in any future process that might seek to define respective sovereign rights in the Aegean.

-- EU accession: Erdogan said he is aware of the positive attitudes of Papandreou regarding Turkey's EU bid, and offered to boost cooperation. U/S Cevik personally commented that Greece's EU veto power is pivotal and should not be used to negate negotiations.

-- Minority issues: Erdogan recognized that the situation of minorities in both countries needs to be addressed.

-- Illegal immigration: the PM noted that this problem impacts both Turkey and Greece, and offered cooperation in the fight against criminal networks involved in smuggling refugees.

¶4. (SBU) Both the Turkish MFA and the Greek Embassy agreed that Cyprus is the key issue that continues to adversely affect bilateral relations. Cevik said that Turkey gives all the support it can to "TRNC President" Mehmet Ali Talat. Cevik and other MFA officials contend that Turkey has the political will to realize a Cyprus solution, but argue that the Greek Cypriots seem to want to buy time. He suggested that the "TRNC Presidential" elections in April are a "natural deadline:" every second year, elections on one side or the other of the island bring about the suspension of talks, but also an opportunity to push progress forward. The DCM said that the US is encouraged that both sides leaders remain publicly and privately committed to the process. The Greek Embassy, however, told us that Turkey's actions in December regarding the Ankara Additional Protocol will be crucial for both bilateral relations and the Cyprus negotiations. (Comment: The Greek Embassy's talking points may be dated. End Comment) Our Greek colleagues emphasized that Greece has been waiting for roughly three years for

movement from Ankara on the Additional Ankara Protocol. Moreover, EU accession cannot progress without movement on Cyprus and Athens needs concrete proposals for action, not a restatement of the issues.

ANKARA 00001637 002 OF 002

15. (C) The positive direction of the bilateral relationship also could be stalled with Turkey's resumption of Aegean overflights. The DCM noted positively Turkey's suspension of overflights of Greek islands during the election and government formation periods in Greece, but reiterated strong USG objections to such overflights, particularly over Farmakonisi and Agathonisi islands, which the US considers to be sovereign Greek territory per the 1947 Treaty of Paris. (Note: The Ambassador made the same points to Under Secretary Sinirlioglu (REFTEL). End Note) Cevik responded the suspension was only temporary, due to the Greek Parliamentary elections, and that Turkey had resumed its overflights on 6 November. He would not comment over which islands were involved. Cevik argued that it was not a sovereignty issue, but rather mere "flight formations."

16. (SBU) Looking ahead, Cevik suggested that Greece's response to the letter and a Turkish reciprocal visit by FM Davutoglu- probably before the December EU summit, could help set the tone for future relations.

COMMENT

17. (C) PM Papandreou's journey to Istanbul in October and his visit to former FM Cem's gravesite drew prominent press coverage and a positive emotional response from most Turks. Papandreou is held in high regard here. That set a promising tone as prelude for the Erdogan overture. However, the path ahead is hardly clear. The apparent resumption of Turkish overflights of Greek islands will be a complicating factor. Turkish MFA officials take comfort that Papandreou knows the deep-seated issues that serve as tripwires for the bilateral relationship.

JEFFREY

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